

S U C C E S S

Communicating Project Impact to Your Disaster Resistant Community

By now you're well on your way to building a disaster resistant community. You've identified and secured interested partners from the community at large. You've assessed your risk for natural disasters. You've written a plan to build a disaster resistant community based on your local circumstances. And you may have even begun implementation of Project Impact. Now what? You will want your community to stay focused on the disaster resistant community objectives of Project Impact—to understand what the disaster resistant community initiatives are, why they are important to everyone, and how to be supportive and get involved. While this chapter includes pointers and ideas to help you do this, you should also know that FEMA may be able to provide sample materials, resources, and additional program ideas based on national activities as Project Impact unfolds.



CASE STUDY

N O R T H R I D G E , C A



Sharing Success

The critical need to communicate with your citizens and businesses about the importance of disaster resistance cannot be overstated. The best way to have the positive message of mitigation take root in your community is to ensure that your community is informed about the undeniable benefits of mitigation and the effect it will have on your community in the future. Perhaps it is best to let Director Witt, in his own words, illustrate the positive power communication can have in your disaster resistance effort. After the 1994 Northridge earthquake, he shared the following story:

“As I have talked with people in many neighborhoods affected by this earthquake, I have met people committed to rebuilding their communities, schools, and their businesses.

While visiting a particularly hard-hit area with Hillary Clinton, I noticed a house that seemed to be in much better shape, both inside and out, than others around it. I talked with the homeowner and asked the gentleman why he had fared so much better. He told me that he had received videotape that showed how to protect a home against earthquake damage. He learned how to secure appliances, such as strapping his water heater, and how to secure bookcases and other items in his house that could topple and cause injury. It worked, and that man and his family were spared much of the anguish that his neighbors were experiencing. This videotape is now available at video rental stores and other locations.”

Perhaps your greatest responsibility and challenge in this effort will be to make sure as many people as possible hear about the benefits of mitigation so that they replicate the success of the homeowner Director Witt encountered after the Northridge earthquake.

KEEP IT GOING

Form a Publicity Subcommittee

To maintain and generate interest and public support, you will need to establish a publicity subcommittee responsible for developing a communications plan that utilizes mass media, special events, spokespeople, and educational outreach.

You will want to appoint a chairperson to head up the effort. This could be someone from the core Project Impact planning committee or another person tied to or at least cognizant of its initiatives. For instance, you may want to contact the public relations or community affairs manager for the city or locate PR people at any one of the partnering companies involved with Project Impact. It is important to note that it will be incumbent upon the subcommittee leader to ensure media coverage and community awareness. It may also prove important to make sure everyone gets a fair share of airtime (i.e., all Project Impact participants should receive the amount of exposure appropriate to their involvement, experience, and desire to communicate with the public).

Make the Media Work For You

You will want to target print, radio, and television outlets at planned intervals with your messages. As gatekeepers to your community, the media affect and shape our opinions and our behavior. They influence our preferences and our choices. By encouraging reporters to write or broadcast your messages, you will generate awareness and interest in Project Impact.



Preparing to Work With the Media

A targeted, comprehensive media list is the most essential tool of any successful media campaign. Your media list should include the reporters in your area who are likely to cover news about Project Impact, most likely those who cover community affairs, natural disasters, or the metro desk.

There are additional pointers for developing media lists in the Media Checklist at the back of the guidebook.

Who's Who?

► To help your group target appropriate reporters, monitor the news to find out who is writing or saying what. In addition to familiarizing yourself with the particular "beats," reading, watching, and listening to the news can give you insights into building relationships with the media. The following tips will help you begin your media outreach:

- Attempt to get to know the city editor(s) and business editor(s) at your local newspapers. Do the same for news assignment editors at relevant radio and television stations.
- Respond to the news: write "letters to the editor" or op-eds. Commend good reporting by sending a letter or making a phone call.
- Invite key reporters out for a business lunch to discuss Project Impact initiatives.

Additional guidelines to help you work with the media can be found in the Media Checklist at the back of the guidebook.

DEVELOPING YOUR MESSAGE

Even though each community will have its own overriding communications objective, the key message in support of building a disaster resistant community is mitigation. In order to mitigate effectively, partnerships need to be formed to lessen the impact of a disaster or hazard to a community before it occurs. Therefore, your secondary message most likely will include the strengths and benefits of alliance building. Once the communications objective has been agreed upon by the members of the *Disaster Resistant Community Planning Committee*, the key messages must be included in all communications: public presentations, written “letters to the editor,” op-ed columns, and media interviews. That message should be used and repeated to ensure that the entire community hears and understands the role of the committee in building a disaster resistant community through Project Impact.

What Is Your Message?

Once you know who in the media you are going to contact, you will want to develop compelling information to send to them. First, define your messages. Then determine how to present the message and information as newsworthy. Keep in mind the reporters’ beats and any relevant information you have discovered about them from monitoring the news (e.g., what they’ve reported on in the past, specific formats or reporting styles, special interests). Remember that any materials you send should help establish and enhance relationships with the press. Contact the right reporter at the appropriate outlet with a relevant story at the right time.

Making Spokespeople Work for You

To help get your message out directly to the community and to help the media do their jobs more effectively, identify various spokespeople who can talk about Project Impact from different points of view. These spokespeople most likely will be members of the Project Impact team. Since group members are key members of the community, they will already be appropriate representatives of your target audiences.

► There are many ways to employ speakers throughout your campaign:

- Offer them as experts to the media (this may include live interviews, quotes, research, or story development)
- Market them to key civic groups in your community such as Rotary and Lions clubs, Girl and Boy Scout troops, Jaycees, Knights of Columbus
- Schedule them as keynote speakers to talk about Project Impact at special events
- Develop public service announcements for broadcast placement with their help

Maximizing the number of different spokespeople who repeat Project Impact messages will help raise awareness because people retain information best when it is presented to them over and over again from a variety of sources. Also, listening to your community and addressing their fears, concerns, and questions is vitally important to success. Your spokespeople will facilitate that exchange and serve as a conduit to public opinion.

Feedback

In addition to receiving feedback about Project Impact from your spokespeople, you will need to develop or create another way to channel communication between the *Disaster Resistant Community Planning Committee* and the general public. For instance, hold regular community meetings to create a public forum in which questions can be asked, issues can be raised, answers can be given, and concerns can be addressed. These public town meetings will also help you sell Project Impact beyond the planning committee to the community at large.

► Be sure to invite:

- Elected officials: mayor, governor, members of legislature or Congress
- Business leaders: largest employers, small business owners, chamber of commerce
- Civic and community groups: Lions Club, Kiwanis, Jaycees, PTAs
- Members of the news media

In addition, your community newspaper may be willing to run a Q & A column about Project Impact initiatives. Or, your local utility company (a planning committee member) may be willing to include a bounceback form or short survey in utility bills. Feedback allows you to adjust your communications plan quickly and effectively, and it allows you to evaluate public opinion and gauge support. This may be particularly important if resentment or controversy is brewing.

The Media as a Partner

Journalists in your community may be ideal partners for participating in and promoting Project Impact. Media outlets serve a dual role in a community: They are a vital source of news and public information before, during, and after a disaster, and, as employers, they are members of the business community. Partnering with your local newspaper or television station will ensure appropriate, ongoing coverage of Project Impact while involving a valuable business partner whose actions are highly visible throughout the community.

Opportunistic Tie-Ins

As we have noted, community involvement in Project Impact is crucial to its success. You will want to assess your community's ongoing activities for opportunities to present information about Project Impact's initiatives. Annual fairs or festivals may offer an opportunity to host an information booth, which will help you get the word out, solicit volunteers, and address public concerns.

Special Events

By publicly tracking the progress of your disaster resistant community, you can help maintain awareness, support, and positive public opinion. To do this, you will want to capitalize on "milestones" occurring throughout the implementation of Project Impact—planning special events, press conferences, celebrations, or other visible and visual proof of your accomplishments. It may be useful to plan milestones to coincide with existing anniversaries, such as the date of a significant disaster in your community's history. Milestone events will generate media attention, community involvement, and public excitement, especially if tied to a locally relevant date and time.

Event Planning Tips

The best way to avoid problems in event planning is to allow plenty of time to plan ahead.

To help you remember important logistics, refer to the Event Planning Checklist at the back of the guidebook.

Also, to extend coverage of your event, create a system for measuring the results of the event. This could include determining how many people attended and/or how much media coverage resulted. Post-event news releases should then focus on these accomplishments.

COMMUNICATING PROJECT IMPACT SUMMARY

► Upon completion of the Fourth Phase of Project Impact you should have:

- Formed a publicity subgroup
- Developed your version of the Project Impact message
- Created a timeline for media outreach in relation to actions carried out
- Recruited media outlets as partners or sponsors
- Developed a speakers bureau
- Developed and distributed promotional mitigation materials
- Accessed FEMA materials (including this guidebook) on the FEMA Web page at www.fema.gov



CHECKLIST

MEDIA



Media lists should include:

Newspapers (dailies, weeklies, monthlies, college/university papers, and community newsletters)	
City and Regional Magazines	
Local Trade and Business Publications	
State Bureaus of National Wire Services , such as the Associated Press (AP), Reuters, and United Press International (UPI)	
Local Radio and Television Stations (including college/university networks)	
Local Cable Stations	
Public Broadcasting Stations (which may have community affairs programming)	
Public Information Officers at military bases, if applicable (many military housing areas have broadcast stations and newsletters that may reach the entire families of service members)	

Regardless of the medium, for the most part your media list will consist of the following types of reporters:

Metro Desk/City Reporters —interested in news “around town”	
Public Affairs Reporters —interested in civic and legislative issues	
Business Reporters —interested in hard news involving regional business, local economy, and economic/community growth (e.g., impact on sales, environment, address changes)	
News Assignment Editors	
Public Service Announcement Directors	

Media Guidelines: When working with reporters, try your best to:

• Correct inaccuracies, otherwise they will be accepted as fact.	
• Pair use of statistics with stories or case studies that bring them to life.	
• Repeat important information to reinforce key message points.	
• Know your community objectives and the goals of Project Impact. Be prepared to provide information and answer questions in depth.	
• Stay out of other people’s business. If a reporter asks you about the emergency fire rescue unit, for example, reply, “Let me get a firefighter to answer that.”	
• Always be honest. If you don’t know an answer to a question say so and offer to find the answer or refer the reporter to someone who can.	

Please copy for use by planning committee

CHECKLIST

EVENT PLANNING



Facility Appearance	
Conduct a "walk through" to determine the appearance of the facility before the event and check for:	
• Condition of signs, canopy, lobby, etc.	
• Adequacy of space for attendance	
• Accessibility for senior citizens and people with disabilities	
• Available parking	
• Bad weather considerations and alternatives	
Equipment	
Test equipment before use and allow time to get any needed replacements. Test the equipment with the actual materials you plan to use ahead of time. This is especially important for manufacturing equipment if you plan to give guided tours.	
Other Considerations	
These may or may not apply to your event, but they are important to keep in mind as you plan for your events:	
• Videotape equipment	
• Microphones/amplifier	
• Lectern	
• Platform/stage	
• Lighting	
• Air conditioning/heating	
• Acoustics	
• Recording equipment	
• Audiovisual aids (e.g., screens, charts, easels, chalkboards, slide projectors, slides)	
• Electrical outlets	
• Tables and chairs	
• Reception area	
• Photographer/video crew	

Materials	
Make sure your spokespeople and staff are equipped with the materials they need to effectively deliver your messages and meet event objectives. Examples include:	
• Agenda, schedule, or program	
• Gifts or awards	
• Brochures	
• Media kits	
• Direction signs	
• Name tags	
• Host badges or ribbons	
• Guest book or sign-in sheet	
• Posters or banners	
• Placards for speakers or guests of honor	
Staffing	
Make sure staff are available to oversee these different functions:	
• Rehearsal	
• Parking/traffic control	
• Registration and guest sign-in	
• Master of ceremonies or emcee duty	
• Photography and videotaping	
• Decorations	
• Catering	
• Audio/visual arrangements	
• Entertainers (such as musicians)	
• Set up/clean up	

NOTE: If your event involves a presentation or demonstration, you may wish to have prepared questions for designated questioners in the audience to facilitate Q&A discussion.